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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the Voyager Expanded Learning programs. Initially begun with hands-on, activity-based learning experiences centered around academic themes designed to pique children's interest and motivate them to learn, Voyager has expanded from elementary after- and summer-school programs to include K-8 programs designed for use during school, after school, between sessions, and summer school. Primary characteristics of Voyager programs include: (1) a restructured classroom that promotes collaborative learning; (2) a redefined role for teachers; (3) objective assessment and evaluation used as a diagnostic tool to facilitate a personalized approach to learning; (4) continuous staff development focusing on standards of authentic instruction; (5) current, research-based curricula that are interdisciplinary, relevant to the real world, discovery-based, and focused on critical thinking; (6) curricula aligned with state standards and targeted to reinforce skills; and (7) programs that develop students' skills in leadership and collaboration. As of June 1999, Voyager summer programs were serving 135,000 students in more than 1,000 districts in 44 states. Sections of the paper discuss background, philosophy and goals, program components, evidence of effectiveness, professional development and support, implementation, costs, considerations, contact information, and policy issues and questions. (SR)

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Voyager

Background - Philosophy and Goals - Program Components - Evidence of Effectiveness
Professional Development and Support - Implementation - Costs - Considerations
Policy Issues and Questions - Resources

Topic or Category: Reading
Grade Level: PreK - 8
Target Population: General, At-risk

OVERVIEW

Background and Scope:

Voyager Expanded Learning was founded in 1994 by Randy Best, a corporate business leader; Admiral Tom Hayward, chief naval officer under Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan; and Barbara Nichols, an educator and training professional. Voyager began by developing hands-on, activity-based learning experiences centered around academic themes designed to pique children's interest and motivate them to learn. Voyager has expanded from elementary after- and summer-school programs to include K-8 programs designed for use during school, after school, between sessions and summer school. Recently, several new programs have been launched, including a comprehensive balanced reading program for kindergarten students, as well as an after-school reading "booster" series for grades 1-2 and 3-4. Voyager's after-school and summer programs extend learning up to three hours a day, five days per week for 36 weeks a year.

Voyager has partnerships with the Smithsonian Institution, Discovery Channel, Polaroid and the Institute for Research on Learning. In addition, Voyager collaborates with NASA and the University of Oregon to provide expertise as well as technical assistance in developing new and different curriculum.

In 1995, Voyager worked with 11 pilot schools in Dallas. By 1998, it had expanded to partnerships with 700 sites and 40 states serving approximately 60,000 students. As of June 1999, Voyager summer programs were serving 135,000 students in more than 1,000 districts in 44 states.

Philosophy and Goals:

Voyager's primary goal is to improve student performance and increase teacher effectiveness. The program is based on the theory that experiential learning with high interest and academically challenging content will motivate all students to learn. This approach gives students opportunities to improve their problem-solving skills as well as basic skills. While Voyager's focus is academically based, the program actively involves students in leadership roles and cooperative learning through participation as "Team Leaders" and "Pathfinders" (paired partners and allies).

Program Components:

The primary characteristics of Voyager programs include the following:
A restructured classroom that promotes collaborative learning
A redefined role for teachers, making each one a co-learner, guide, coach and mentor
Objective assessment and evaluation used as a diagnostic tool to facilitate a personalized approach to learning
Continuous staff development focusing on standards of authentic instruction
Current, research-based curricula that are interdisciplinary, relevant to the real world, discovery-based and focused on critical thinking

Curricula aligned with state standards and targeted to reinforce skills based on the results of state and national assessments
Programs that develop students' skills in leadership and collaboration and provide experiences that help prepare them for citizenship and the work world.

Evidence of Effectiveness:

Summary of Evidence
Over the past couple of years, the effectiveness of Voyager reading programs has been independently evaluated by school districts and the University of Texas. Overall, the data show a positive impact on student performance in a short time period (summer school). At this point, the statistical significance of some of the results cannot be determined, but the developer will analyze the data in coming months. In addition, none of the studies includes control or comparison groups. As more districts institute summer and after-school programs, however, the opportunity for control-group studies and comparisons to other extended-time programs will increase.

Discussion of Evidence
1. *Voyager Reading Study with University of Texas* (1999)
In the summer of 1999, approximately 6,000 students in six districts (Milwaukee, Tulsa, Houston, Philadelphia, Columbia, S.C., and New York City) participated in the Time Warp reading program for 20 days. Voyager developed a pretest and a post-test, which were validated by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, to measure achievement during that time. All tests are being independently scored by the National Center for Statistics and analyzed and reported by the University of Texas. Listed below are the preliminary results, including composite skills (overall reading) test results, based on a possible score of 45. The composite skills score represents the total score of the three subtests: decoding, word recognition and comprehension. (New York City post-test scores were not available at the time of this review.)

NOTE: Data for this study currently are incomplete. The developer, however, intends to analyze the results more thoroughly to determine the significance of these results. ECS will update this summary when more information becomes available.

Average Pretest, Average Post-test and Average Percent Gains in Composite Reading Skills (Overall Reading)

District and Grade Levels	Number of Participants (Composite Skills Test)	Average Pre-test Score (possible score is 45)	Average Post-test Score (possible score is 45)	Average Percent Gain
Columbia, S.C. Grades 2-5 Grades 4-5	620 700	28.48 30.62	34.13 36.48	20% 19%
Houston (Grades 4-6)	114	30.83	36.13	17%
Milwaukee Grades 2-3 Grades 4-5	96 38	28 33.18	34 37.08	21% 12%
Tulsa (Grades 2-5)	66	27.64	32.64	18%

2. *Jefferson County, Kentucky*
During the summer of 1999, the Jefferson County School District initiated a summer school program for elementary, middle and high school students with the greatest academic need. The six participating elementary schools used the Voyager summer reading program for 20 days. Because attendance was not consistent throughout the summer (e.g., only one-third of the students attended 85% or more of the

time), pretest and post-test scores were not available for all students. Nonetheless, a total of 429 students had matched pretest and post-test scores on the Stanford Achievement Test reading test (Stanford 9). The district consulted with experts who publish the Stanford tests to determine what would constitute statistically significant performance gains for a short-term program versus an entire school year. An NCE (normal curve equivalent) of 2.3 was identified as statistically significant. (NCEs represent the "expected growth" on a standardized test or can indicate how close a particular student, school or district test score is to the national average.) The six elementary schools demonstrated the following NCE gains during the 20-day program period:
Atkinson - 4.1
Blue Lick - 4.1
Lincoln - 5.1
Maupin - 4.6
Semple - 1.6
Wellington - 3.3
Over the 1999-2000 school year, the district intends to evaluate students who participated in the Voyager summer school program (as well as other summer school programs) as well as students who were identified for summer school but did not attend. The objective is to determine if the summer school students maintain their gains through the year and how their performance compares to similar students who did not participate.

3. *University of Texas Reading Study* (1998)
Voyager contracted with faculty at the University of Texas Evaluation and Measurement Center in 1998 to look at the effects of its Time Warp summer reading program on student achievement in a nationwide study. This study, conducted by Anne Seraphine, included 173 students in four districts (Richmond, Virginia; Memphis, Tennessee; Hayward, California; and West Contra Costa, California) who participated in the 19-day program. Gains were measured through a pretest and post-test in three different areas of reading performance: reading comprehension, decoding and word recognition. A total of 37 points was possible for the composite skills score (decoding-12 points, word recognition-15, comprehension-10). The test was developed by Voyager and reviewed, scored and analyzed by the University of Texas. Results were positive in all three areas, including the gains listed in the following table.

NOTE: Data for this study are currently incomplete. The developer, however, intends to analyze the results more thoroughly to determine the significance of these results. ECS will update this summary when more information becomes available.

Average Pretest Scores, Post-test Scores and Percent Gains in Decoding, Word Recognition, Reading Comprehension and Overall Reading (Composite Score)

Subtest	Number of Participants	Average Pre-Test Scores	Average Post-Test Scores	Average Percent Gains
Decoding (12 possible points)	95	3.15	6.33	100%
Word Recognition (15 possible points)	74	9.85	12.47	27%
Comprehension (10 possible points)	125	3.19	5.79	82%
Composite Skills (37 possible points)	103	17.63	24.00	36%

Other Student Indicators:
The Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Schools provided a summer school program in 1999 for 588 K-5 foster children and students whose parents qualified for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. The Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory-2 (CFSEI-2), a standardized, self-reported inventory, was used to measure the difference between students' self-esteem at the beginning and end of the program. The self-esteem components of the CFSEI-2 are general, social, academic and parental. Data

from participating elementary schools showed gains in students' self-esteem ranging from 3.7% to 10.2% after participating in the Voyager program, with one school showing a 3.5% loss.

Professional Development and Support:

Implementation training is designed for teachers and site directors. Training provides information on Voyager's classroom structure, current teaching methodologies and curriculum content. Voyager training consists of six-hour days, excluding breaks and lunch. A certified Voyager University trainer conducts onsite training for the two-day certification or one-day recertification program. Staff development during the school year is supported through a weekly video series on online resources.

Voyager provides ongoing evaluation and support to customers at all levels in a district. This summer, for example, Voyager instituted out-bound phone calls to site directors and teachers in every district using the program. This evaluation collected information on perceptions of program quality, field support and program implementation. The information produced a summer program audit trail of all reported problems and needs, as well as commentary on program strengths.

Implementation:

Districts that implement Voyager move through implementation differently depending on the type of program implemented and the time of year installed. For example, schoolwide implementation could mean using reading programs from in-school kindergarten through after-school 1st-8th-grade programs. Some districts have opted to use after-school booster programs in reading for some students, while others in the same school participate in academically oriented enrichment programs. In contrast, some schools use only one after-school program incorporating two grade levels or the summer school program. A schoolwide strategy can provide after-school and in-school programming, as well as academic summer programs for all students, adding as much as a semester of learning per school year.

In the three case studies included in the McKenzie study, success of district implementation was highly dependent upon having a site director and, as necessary, site coordinators. For example, in Dallas, more than 70 sites were involved in Voyager summer programs for Title I students in 1999. Nine coordinators visited each classroom two and three times a week providing direct support for teachers. Adequate training is also important for success, as well as having qualified teachers who are willing to implement the Voyager program with fidelity to its principles and methodology.

The developer has established a set of requirements for schools interested in implementing Voyager as a schoolwide intervention program, including the following:
The district superintendent commits to full program implementation, at all grade levels, open to all students but targeting those in need of extra time and remediation.
The principal agrees to implement a schedule and budget or resources for training and site management, and a timetable for implementing extended-learning programs and procedures in all grades after school and during the summer for all students.
The teachers agree and commit to providing instruction after school and during the summer, attending scheduled training, receiving in-program monitoring and assistance, and using program-specific curriculum and instructional materials designed by Voyager.
The general goal is to offer expanded learning to all K-8 classes by the second year of implementation. During the next three years, students in need of acceleration would be targeted.

Costs:

The cost to a district for using Voyager is basically the cost of the curriculum (which includes the essential instructional materials) and teacher training. Districts that implement Voyager during the school day incur no additional costs for staffing. When the program is implemented as an after-school program, additional costs for teachers and a site director are incurred. Often, a district already has allocated for such costs and the only additional cost is that of Voyager. Summer programs customarily are budgeted for in terms of staffing and program materials. The cost of Voyager generally is within a district's budget.

Based on the full price, the cost per child is $244 for a full-year after-school program and $124 for the full summer program. Reduced prices are available for large-scale implementations.

The cost for professional development sessions is $150 per person for groups of 25 or more with onsite training. Districts with fewer than 25 attendees will incur a $3,700 minimum charge for onsite training, or they can join the nearest participating district to minimize their cost. All food, lodging and travel expenses are the responsibility of attendees.

Considerations:

To date, the Jefferson County, Kentucky, results are the strongest evidence supporting the effectiveness of the Voyager reading program. Results of the University of Texas studies will require more analysis to determine the statistical and/or substantive significance and to make the percentage gains more meaningful. At the present time, programs such as Voyager face challenges since schools and districts are just beginning to organize extended-time programs that are more structured and have clearly stated goals (such as increasing student test scores to meet district or state performance standards). Performance data and expectations for extended-time and/or short-term intervention programs are somewhat limited, but will become increasingly important to collect and analyze as districts make use of time beyond the normal school day and year.

Another consideration for schools and districts interested in implementing Voyager programs is the need to ensure adequate time for teachers and students to complete the daily lessons. As with any program, following the developer's suggestions for implementation will increase the program's impact on student performance.

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Policy Issues and Questions:
How can states help districts and schools choose the most appropriate reading programs to improve students' skills and performance? What information and assistance would be useful?
Should states promote particular reading programs for districts and schools to use?
How can a reading program's track record be checked and validated?
What criteria should states and districts use to invest in various reading programs initially and for the long term?
How should policymakers weigh the benefits of a reading program versus its cost and required resources?
Can a balance be struck between effectiveness and efficiency?
What state policies can help improve teacher training and professional development so teachers are better equipped to help all students read successfully?

Resources:
The McKenzie Group, Inc. (1998). *An Evaluation of Voyager Expanded Learning Programs: Final Report.* Submitted to Voyager Expanded Learning, Inc., Dallas, Texas.

Seraphine, Anne. E (1998, unpublished). *Evaluation of the Voyager Expanded Learning Summer Reading Program.* University of Texas at Austin.

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